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THE ATHEIST.

AN ORIGINAL POEM

BY

ARTHUR LILLEY.



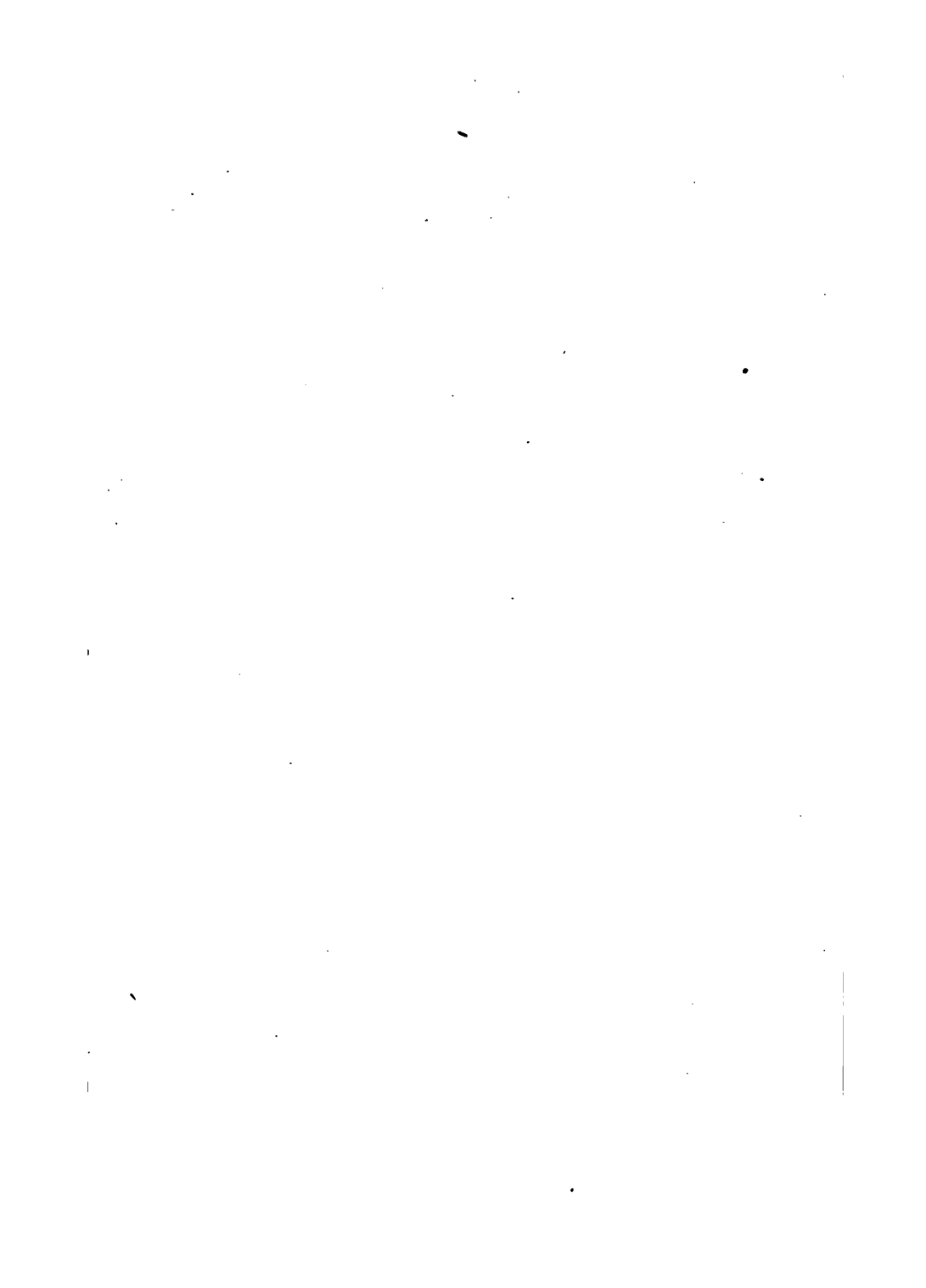
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THE ATHEIST.

An Original Poem.

BY

ARTHUR LILLEY.

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THE ATHEIST.

CANTO I.

HIS life was in the evening shadows now,
His outward form to set, his soul to rise ;
And, by the wrinkles on his jaded brow,
'Twas visible in life's bold enterprise
He had not let his days pass by for nought,
But seized the time, and for earth's knowledge sought.

He'd read of all the pomp of Syria's kings,
How they had flourished in the days gone by ;
But all their glory now in memory sings,
Only the ruined city now is nigh ;
All else has fled—pride, pomp are in the dust ;
So perish all who but in self have trust.

He'd read of Greece, that land of might and fame,
How it had held the world beneath its sway,
O Greeks ! why is your power not the same ?
Is this the poet's haunt—the hero's day ?
O Greece ! thou glory of the ancient world,
What drove thy heroes out, and thee o'erhurl'd ?

He'd read how Rome had led her legions forth,
And with her might the nations overcame,
Piercing from east to west, from south to north,
Until mankind stood trembling at her name :
Now all is ruin, and seek where you can
A Roman—earth knows not of such a man !

Had they but known the Truth as we have known,
They might have held the world with such a power
That all mankind would kneel before God's throne,
And they had been the same until this hour,
What they were then—the mightiest in the land,
In mind and glory, as God's chosen band.

But God's immortal wisdom did not deign
That they should bear His message to the world ;
But that above them other lands should reign,
And all their glory to the ground be hurled—
A dread example to each Christian land,
That without God no power can ever stand.

Yet what had all his learning for him done ?
He was alone, and pondering o'er the past :
His years of manly strength had long since gone ;
'Twas strange to him that nothing here could last :
Friends he had known in youth, in manhood, fled ;
Some far in distant climes, some with the dead.

Many whom in his early youth he knew,
Strong, young, just entering on the road of life,
Met death before they had a distant view
Of life's maturer years of joy and strife :
It troubled him that thus they had gone by,
And in the silent grave so soon to lie.

Why should we live so brief, so short a time ?

We scarcely look around us ere we die ;
And earth is filled with violence and crime ;
Men smile at death and calmly pass it by :
Not all his learning, all his mighty lore,
Could solve that question, often asked before.

He was a man, kind-hearted and sincere,
Pitied the helpless, aided the distress'd ;
He loved the truth, and had a conscience clear,
And by the poor his name was always blest ;
Riches he had, and all that earth could give ;
This only troubled him, why man should live ?

He was alone—except a little child
That was his all to him in his last years ;
It was so young, so gentle, and so mild,
It made him love it and forget his cares ;
When he was wrapt in thought, as even now,
It laid a kiss upon his aged brow.

It was the orphan of his dearest friend,
Who on his death-bed placed it in his hand,
And said, " This little one from sin defend,
And in my place a father to it stand."
His promise was the last the father heard—
" I will defend it"—and he kept his word.

It knew not that he had no faith in God ;
He never told it—no, he would not mar
Its happy hours, as steadfastly it trod,
Looking above with faith beyond yon star :
He marvell'd that its inexperienced mind,
In loving God, such happiness could find.

For, ever since that child had been his care,
His thoughts had been disturbed, his conscience spoke
And urged him of a future to beware ;
But of a life beyond he had no hope :
Yet, when at night it took its last " Adieu,"
And kissed him smiling said, " May God bless you!"—

'Twas then he felt a power within his breast
That bid him bless it in return again ;
He dared not, though he felt that it was best,
By some great Power that mitigated pain :
It was so happy in its trust above,
Because its faith was in a God of Love.

"'Tis childish ignorance," his heart would say ;
"And yet I wish that ignorance were mine :"
The joy of hope is the true healing ray
Of disappointment. Hope, thou art divine !
Thou showerest comfort from thy guardian wing ;
Thou lift'st the beggar up, and mak'st him king.

True Hope with Faith and Truth is always found ;
They are immortal, therefore cannot fade ;
They make the soul with energy rebound,
And say to man, he was for something made ;
Though here his labours may appear in vain,
Yet he shall find what he so wished to gain.

The child was guarded by those heavenly powers,
 Whilst the old man refused to have their aid ;
But oh ! he lacked them in his lonely hours,
 He knew not of the happiness they made.
The child enjoyed it, but the aged man
Sought not, but wondered at the mighty plan.

Its innocence and trust in One above,
 As on its knees it knelt in fervent prayer,
And prayed to meet its parents through His love,
 In that bright land that is for ever there,
And for its earthly guardian here below ;
His heart would rise and cause his tears to flow.

Yet his belief in no o'erruling power
 Remained unmoved ; he thought all hope was vain ;
He deemed that man was but a fading flower,
 That when he died should never rise again ;
All followed Nature's course, to live and die,
And like a whirlwind presently pass by.

Thus he lived on, but nothing gave relief ;

He thought of what the learned wrote of yore,
But still remained as firm in disbelief,

That after death mankind was nothing more :
He could not deem the truth, wherein men trod,
That man's immortal, and there is a God.





CANTO II.

IT was a summer's eve : he lay reclin'd,
Gazing upon the sunset's fading ray,
And thoughts came rolling o'er his thinking mind,
How like to man the dying of the day ;
But shall he rise, as doth the sun again ?
Troubled his conscience, and his aged brain.

The child had gone to rest : this was the hour
In which, alone, he communed with his soul ;
His cultured mind had still its youthful power,
Though time upon his frame showed its control ;
Scenes long since passed before him came once more,
And beat on Memory's ever-sounding shore.

The sun had sunk, the stars began to shine ;
He looked upon them with his upturned eye ;
“ And shall they all,” said he, “ like man decline,
“ And fade for ever, and for ever die ? ”
Then conscience (language of the soul) said, “ No,
All are immortal, for God made them so.”

His will was stubborn, and would not give way
To what his heart believed ; he had so long
Abandoned Hope, that in its place Dismay
Had by degrees around him grown so strong,
That Hope was almost quenched by Sin’s domain,
Who had usurped its throne, and dared to reign.

But Hope would not give way, and conquered fly,
But struggled on, opposed by man and sin ;
It never leaves the man until he die,
And the last battle generally doth win,
Strikes such a blow that sin in terror flies,
And man beneath his power trembling lies.

And as he lay the starlight o'er him fell ;
And sleep o'ercame his years, and bade him rest,
And o'er him cast her calm, refreshing spell,
That by the troubled mind is always blest ;
His wondering thoughts their search awhile would cease,
And now for a few hours he was at peace.

It is so common for us all to dream ;
We think it but a part of Nature's course ;
We wake, and smile at it, and only deem
It was a foolish fancy, or remorse
For what has fled ; it has not our esteem ;
Men think nought of it, for it was a dream.

Some may be so : think'st thou the God of Heaven
Permits one moment of our life to fail
In use, and that to dream alone is given
To pass unheeded as a fairy tale ?
Ah, no ! whate'er God places in man's mind,
Is for the benefit of human-kind.

And thus it happened, as the old man lay
Wrapt in the mantle-folds of sleep around,
He had a vision, brighter than the day,
And heard sweet voices of celestial sound ;
Far in the distance came the accents dim,
Which seemed the echoes of an angel's hymn.

And as his soul's ear drank the heavenly song,
Which echoed as it went from star to star,
He deemed it could not be a mortal throng,
That caused such sounds to reach him from afar ;
But 'twas some host unknown to man below,
Whose music o'er creation seemed to flow.

What power can satisfy the soul's desire,
To know from whence they came, or who they were ?
When lo ! a Form, in spotless bright attire,
Whose presence made the light shine everywhere,
Before him stood ; and with a look sincere,
Poured forth these accents in his dreaming ear :—

VOICE.

“Mortal, I have come to thee
From the land where thou shalt be ;
Think not that this life is all,
And that man is made to fall
Like the tree, to rise no more ;
Man his Maker shall adore.
Sorrow's face be turned to joy
Happiness know no alloy :
Labour there endures no pain,
There we find the lost again ;
Work is pleasure, for above
The ruling power with us is Love :
Life is but a shadow here
To the life we live up there ;

Man is here by sin opprest,
There man is at perfect rest—
Rest, from all that mars the road
That leads to Truth, and points to God :
Rest, that makes the soul expand,
Freed from tyrannous command ;
Urged by every passing breeze,
For work is pleasure when at ease.
There progression knows no stay,
All are marching on one way :
We on earth's rough path have trod,
But are now at peace with God.
Therefore, mortal, look above,
Trusting in a God of Love :
Though your frame be old with years,
And your mind be full of cares,
Cast your burden on the Lord,
And rely upon His Word :
Hope is man's immortal part,
Faith the centre of his heart.

Look above, and you shall live ;
God is ready to forgive.
Future bliss no tongue can tell,
Rise up, mortal ; now, Farewell.

And with these words it fled its upward way ;
And in his ear he heard the hymn again
Of myriad voices singing, " Come away."
His soul leapt up with gladness at the strain ;
He heard his mother call him from afar,
As though she spake from yonder morning star.

Then, as a flash of lightning o'er the sky,
He saw an angel-host of living light,
Which shone upon his soul's immortal eye,
And in an instant vanished out of sight ;
He heard their music melting far away ;
He woke, and found the morning's early ray.

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It was a dream—he knew it was a dream,
And yet he felt uneasy, as he thought
Of that bright spirit which to earth had been ;
And still he deemed it was a thing of nought.
He could not, would not, look beyond and see,
Far in the future, of the life to be.





CANTO III.

O PEACE of mind, how happy is the man
Who is possessed of thee ! But to be so
There is one only course wherein he can
Obtain it in this fickle world below :
He must look upward, tread the narrow road,
For peace of mind can only be with God.

Trusting in One above, who giveth all
That man is here to suffer or enjoy ;
He who looks down and marks each sparrow fall
Watches how men below their powers employ ;
Blesses the man who tries to raise mankind,
Pities the wayward and the spirit-blind.

How oft we see those working for the best
Whose life seems lost, in their unheeded toil;
Are scorned at, mocked at, rather than are blest,
Till some from the true enterprise recoil !
But think not 'tis from Heaven such ills arise ;
'Tis sin alone which Goodness thus defies.

Then shall frail mortals make us swerve or shrink
From what we know is right, and good, and true—
We who upon Eternity's vast brink
Of future bliss have caught a clearer view ;
Fear to stand forth and to the world proclaim,
The strength of goodness, and of sin the shame ?

Pleasure on earth is always joined with pain,
Except the pleasure which in Truth is found :
It flies, and never will be found again,
For it has sunk as ashes to the ground.
All mortal pleasure soon is o'er and past ;
Immortal it must be if meant to last.

And thus the old man sought the child's repose;

But he found none, because he sought it not
In God, who is the Healer of all woes;

And peace of mind with Him is without spot.
The little one had found it, though unsought,
Because it trusted what its mother taught.

Poor aged mortal, lost on trouble's sea !

Again his mind was clouded o'er with grief;
The future was as dark as death could be ;
He had no place to go and find relief ;
The child who cheered him on from day to day
Now on a couch in fevered sickness lay.

He watched it with a father's tender cares,

He loved it as it were his very own ;
If it should leave him in his winter years
All his delight in life would then have flown ;
It was his only hope, his joy, his stay ;
It almost urged him to look up and pray.

Oft would a tear roll down his withered cheek,
To think for ever it might pass away.
“Do not,” it said, “be sad,” with accents meek,
For we are sure to meet again one day,
In that bright land where dwell the blessed dead.”
But oh ! the old man sadly shook his head.

“Oh, yes! we all shall meet again above,
Never to part, and never to know pain;
There is a land of endless, endless love,
Where all we lose on earth we shall regain :
If I should be the first hence to repair,
I’ll come and meet you when you join us there.”

Then raising up its head upon its hand,
With accents sweet, it sang the beauteous hymn
Taught by its mother, of the happier land,
Which made the old man’s eyes with tears grow dim ;
The sound swept o’er him, like a radiant beam
Sprung from the song he heard within his dream.

CHILD'S HYMN.

“ Pilgrim, why in sadness,
In the desert roam?
All above is gladness,
Angels call you home.

“ Hark ! their distant voices
Break upon my ear ;
How my heart rejoices
Their sweet song to hear !

“ He can have no sorrow,
Who sweet music sings ;
Oh, that I could borrow
Their immortal wings !

“ On my spirit falling,
Hark ! I hear them say—
'Tis to me they're calling—
' Pilgrim, come away !

“ ‘Do not linger, mortal,
Enter into day ;
Death is Life’s true portal ;
Come, oh, come away ! ’ ”

Its face shone like an angel’s, clothed in light—
The light of Truth ; the smile of Hope was there ;
The eye of Faith beamed as the morn-star bright ;
This was the peace of mind through holy prayer ;
It makes the darkness like the sun to glow ;
Death is so cruel, for sin makes it so.

He stood now on the verge’s very brink,
His course must change now for its fatal end ;
He felt his outward form to wave and sink,
His soul to glow with vigour to ascend ;
And all spoke of a future state above,
A land of happiness, a realm of love.

He gazed upon the child with looks of fear ;
Conscience cried out, " There is a life on high ;"
He knew its end was very, very near,
But could not deem it would for ever die ;
Believe he could not that he would not see
Its angel-face again in years to be.

It held its dying hand for him to take,
And, with a look that could not be in vain,
In faltering accents bade him for its sake,
" Weep not, for we in Heaven shall meet again,
In the true home, where all is pure and bright,
Where God is King—He is the soul's true Light."

The light was fading in its truth-lit eye,
The scene was more than mortal sight could bear ;
First upon him, and then a glance on high,
As though it saw its future dwelling there ;
Then with the faintest whisper said, " I come,
Take me, oh ! take me to my home, my home."

Yes, Death had come, but with no cruel hand,
But as a minister of light divine,
To bear its spirit to a heavenly land,
Where with the spotless it should ever shine ;
It turned its head, and drew its latest breath,
Smiling upon the dreaded form of Death.

'Twas gone—the little one from earth was gone ;
Its earthly pilgrimage was quickly o'er ;
It left the aged still to journey on,
It now had entered on the happy shore.
How wondrous Death should take the little flower,
And leave the grain until another hour !

“ And hast thou gone for ever from my sight,
And left me all alone—no more to come ?
Will thy sweet voice, which was my sole delight,
For ever in the silent grave be dumb ?
Were those last words of thine of future bliss
An empty hope—is there no world but this ?

“ Must that bright face, lit by the light of Truth,
Return to dust, and never more be seen ?
Must childhood, manhood, age, and beauteous youth,
Become as though they never here had been ?
Why does my mind the satisfaction crave ?
Is there no spark of life beyond the grave ?

“ O Death ! thou murderous tyrant to mankind !
What object hast thou thus to strike thy blow
Upon the innocent ? Could'st thou not find
Another plain, where riper grain doth grow ?
Why take the little bud, and leave me here,
One worn with years, and by long toilings sere ?

“ And yet methinks it was more fit to die,
Prepared more perfectly to pass away
To—ah ! but where ?—I know not but to lie
And moulder in the cold and senseless clay.”
He could no more ; by grief and age oppressed
He sank ; and thus a Voice to him addressed ;—

“ All that thou seest, mortal, round thee cast,
Trees, flowers and shrubs, and hill and dale unknown,
Have in them particles of those gone past,
In years forgot and centuries long flown ;
Each blade of grass that bends beneath man's feet
Is nourished by a heart that once did beat.

“ When from this outward form the breath has fled,
Within the dust the lifeless-seeming frame
Is placed, 'tis man alone who says, ‘Tis dead.’
Poor thoughtless man ! thy ignorance now blame.
Within that silent form, think what you will,
There is a life that Death can never kill.

“ When, from the ground, the sleeping shall arise—
As all shall on that day that knows no night—
Then shall a vision burst before men's eyes,
Of all the human myriads, clothed in light.
This earth, bereft of man, shall only be
An atom to the world which now you see.

“ Man is far greater than mankind doth deem—

Immortal as his Maker ; though oppressed
For a few fleeting years, which do but seem
The prologue to an everlasting rest.
God with immortal life man did invest ;
God bless him, and he shall be ever blest ! ”

’Twas strange that there the lifeless body lay,

The aged gazing on the faded bloom :
He who had through life’s troubles toiled all day
Left, when his joy had sunk into the tomb ;
Left, ’till life’s sun should sink into the west,
That he might find on earth that Heaven is rest.

He sat as though a spell was o’er him cast,

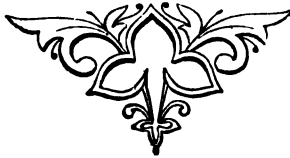
His eyes fixed on that calm and placid face ;
He was now truly all alone at last,
Left on the wide, wide world his way to trace.
That tender voice that urged him on had flown,
And now he felt he was on earth alone.

He felt that he had traversed on a road
That brought no peace or comfort to the weak ;
'Twas that his aim in life was without God,
But where to find he knew not—where to seek.
A still small voice he heard with accents mild,
“ Ye who seek Heaven must seek it like a child.”

Its little hand within his grasp grew cold,
The smile still played upon its pallid face ;
Oh ! how could cruel Death have been so bold,
To stop it in the outset of life's race ?
He could no more in silent grief remain,
But cried aloud, “ I shall see it again !”

Hope o'er his soul had won a triumph now,
Faith stood a conqueror over Disbelief ;
Satan had “ Loss ” engraved upon his brow,
And Truth stood smiling o'er the vanquished chief.
The angels struck their harps with loud acclaim ;
Heaven echoed with the World-Redeemer's name.

The old man sank upon his knees opprest ;
Faith whispered in his ear the strength of prayer,
Truth urged him that alone in God man's blest,
Hope told him that the child was in God's care.
" O God," he cried, " forgiveness to me deign,
If not too late ! "—the angels sang again.





CANTO IV.

WITHIN the tomb the little one was laid,
The birds their carol o'er it daily sang ;
And, as by some celestial power bade,
From out the grassy mound the flowerets sprang,
To show that Immortality was there
For ever with the child of fervent prayer.

'Twas eventime : the old man bent his way
Toward that frequented spot, to him so dear ;
He felt that it was hallowed by the ray
Of truth and purity, which banish fear.
The silence of the night to him was peace,
When earth's rough tumult for awhile would cease.

Whene'er we look upon the hallowed spot
Where one is sleeping in that long repose,
A feeling o'er us comes—we know not what ;
We pity him, freed from a life of woes,
Nor think that o'er us he may smiling be,
Pitying our sorrows now that he is free.

Who are so free as those within the grave ?
We think that they lie there in slumb'ring death :
But He whose hand is stretchèd out to save
Hath borne the soul by His life-giving breath
Beyond the stars, to live in life's bright day,
Where night ne'er spreads her wings in dark array.

A land of light is that which greets the soul,
Freed from the dungeon of this earthly frame,
'Tis Life itself when under no control'
Of sin, or by dishonour put to shame.
Can there be darkness in the land of God,
Or in the realm where lasting Truth has trod?

It was a summer night : the old man gazed
Upon the grassy mound beneath his feet ;
Then to the stars his wandering eyes he raised,
And thought 'twas there that he ere long should meet
The little one, who, with its truthful eye,
Taught him to live, and, greater far, to die.

Oh, what a little child may do, to win
A soul for God, by innocent belief ;
A love for Truth, and hatred against sin,
And make an aching heart find some relief
In prayer, in faith, in persevering still,
To act aright and do God's holy will !

No faith is like a child's, no trust so strong,
When led by love and urged by Kindness' voice ;
And blest be they who warn it of the wrong,
And in the right bid it in God rejoice :
A mother makes the child whose constant care
Teaches its infant lips its daily prayer.

Had the old man forgotten what she taught
To him, in bygone years? Was all in vain,
Those hours of watchful toil, with grief oft fraught?
Were they but idle words? Had all her pain
To urge him onward to the light of God
Been nought? Had he forsook the narrow road?

'Twas then that Memory took him back, to trace
The long-forgotten scenes of childhood's days,
When he had bent before the Throne of Grace,
And at his mother's knee had lisped God's praise.
No time had been so happy and so sweet
As when he knelt down at his mother's feet.

For true religion makes not man a fool,
As the world deems it does; it raises him
From out the undermining glassy pool
Of vice, which swallows all around its brim;
It makes him stand upright and fear no harm,
For he is guarded by his Maker's arm.

Religion does not mope about, and be
In everlasting tears for sins gone by;
Or, like the proud and haughty Pharisee,
In sackcloth and in ashes grovelling lie;
It does not stop the course which man doth run,
But urges him, and says, "Go on, go on!"

Is man ashamed to own that all his power,
His genius, talent, whatsoe'er it be,
Permitted is, and aided every hour
By Him alone who made earth, sky, and sea—
Whose breath is in His hand, whose light His eye,
And by a thought can cause the world to die?

How bitter is remorse! when what has past
Is all forgiven by the loved behest,
"Do better for the future, and now cast
Thy lot upon a fairer field more blest,"
The powers all join in gratitude, and feel
A force which bids them use their utmost zeal.

Ay, there the old man stood in night's calm hour ;
Not e'en the summer breeze disturbed the calm ;
For nature seemed spell-bound, or lost her power,
Or sleeping 'mid the peaceful silent balm
Of what we dream in Eden's sinless bowers ;
Bade all repose, and kissed to sleep the flowers.

'Twas then he heard the voice of conscience break
The silence, and with words of comfort sing
A soothing song, which bade his spirit wake
And with it join ; its accents seemed to bring
Peace to his soul, till he felt far away
In Spirit-land, for there he seemed to stray :—

HYMN.

“ Arise, and mourn not for the past,
For brighter days will come,
When all shall meet in joy at last
In Eden's fadeless home.

" The tears that in this life are shed
By those who seek the right,
Shall crown like diamonds the head
In everlasting light.

" The cries of anguish that have torn
The hearts with grief opprest,
Shall burst the song, and wake the morn,
That shines upon the blest.

" Each action, word, or look, or thought,
Which urges those astray
To seek the right, shall then be brought
To light ; and ne'er decay.

" Then why in this brief stay repine,
For hopes we ne'er have found ;
And think not of the life divine,
Where ever joys abound ?

" Hopes are but shadows that extend
No further than the grave ;
Unless they with the soul ascend,
And boldly sin outbrave.

“Not all the myriad worlds contain,
Or souls that e'er have trod
The universe, can true life gain,
Unless they look to God.”

Thus in the realm of thought the old man strayed,
Unconscious of all else except the sound
Of thought ; and all unknowingly he laid
His weary form upon the hallowed ground.
In that still hour nought could his soul annoy,
He lay in peace, and dreamed a dream of joy.

It was a dream the future did unfold
That pen cannot express, nor words display ;
'Tis thought alone wherein the tale is told,
For can a mortal show immortal day ?
Can words produce what language cannot tell,
Or man presume to show where God doth dwell ?

O Thought ! thou language of the soul of man,
Thy ceaseless voice its song doth ever sing ;
No power can quench thee, and no evil can,
For sweet remembrance often it doth bring ;
Points to the future, till we seem to be
Plunged in the waves of vast eternity !

Long-honoured Wisdom much on us bestows ;
It tells man what he is, and whence he came,
And helps him through his dangers and his woes,
And says he will not always be the same ;
It tells him that this earth is not his home,
But as a pilgrim he is forced to roam.

It tells him of a land where he shall be,
And bids him trust in it, and he shall find
What yet he cannot in the future see,
Because his mortal eyes with sin are blind.
But Thought, immortal Thought, it tells him too,
And also places Heaven before his view.

It shows him regions that he ne'er has seen,
 Pictures the mansions of the blest above,
Brings back before his mind in glorious sheen
 The mighty workings of his Maker's love.
For though this world is strewn with many a care,
Yet there are spots of brightness everywhere.

Look on yon spotless cloud that decks the sky
 With beauty and with brightness, while the sun
Upon it beams ; its borrowed light will fly
 Whene'er the sun from out its field hath run,
And into darkness turn, and its fair form,
Which looked so glorious, will be turned to storm.

So with mankind, while Heaven doth on him smile
 For his endeavours to attain the right,
And act with truthfulness, and use no guile,
 For acts of goodness are not hid in night :
God doth endow His servants with His might,
Whose wrath is darkness, but whose smile is light.



CANTO V.

MONTHS rolled away : the old man's course was bent
On seeking Heaven ; for now he knew 'twas there
That Hope was perfect, and that aid was sent
By that high Power which bore our grief and care.
The Bible was his joy, which in disdain
He had so long thrown by, as though 'twas vain.

Among the many lessons that it told
Was one that cheered him more than all the rest ;
Like to a spell it would his spirit hold
Aloof from all despairs. Oh, how he bless'd
That sacred page, which bade his soul rejoice
To hear its words, as from an angel's voice !

'Twas of the son who left his father's home,
And squandered all his wealth in other lands
In seeking earthly pleasure ; he would roam
For joys which foolishness alone demands ;
And like the rest who followed, he found not,
But in its stead sad failure was his lot.

Then, when by all forsaken, and cast down
By want and deep regret, he thought of home
That he had left, he felt that now a frown
Would be his greeting should he hither come ;
Yet he would try to seek a servant's hire,
And serve the lord who was his very sire.

Bright unexpected happiness and joy
When he would see his home across the wild,
How would he not his energies employ !
When, lo ! the father runs to meet his child,
And falls upon his neck, and looks above,
Thanks God, and weeps with joy the tears of love.

He had forgiven him all before he sought,
Such is the joy at finding what was lost.
And is mankind with kindness more o'erfraught
Than the Creator for His children, toss'd
By all the wilds of sin? He too will greet
All who return to Him, and gladly meet.

How many are there, in this world of ours,
Atheists by name, although they think it not ;
Living within the desecrated bowers
Of worldly folly, duty all forgot ;
God as unknown to them as what will be,
Although they live 'mid Christianity.

Poor blinded mortals! 'tis too sad to blame
Your fate ; 'tis more for pity to shed tears,
To watch you hasten to your end of shame.
Reckless of fate, too foolish to have fears,
If ye but knew the end of folly's race,
Your steps would slacken in that awful chase.

Followed so long, they fear to stop and think ;
It is so taking that it seizes all
Their energies ; until upon the brink
Of future it o'erflies, and down they fall
In the abyss of error, and await
The end, and mourn, when mourning is too late,

'Tis want of thought that causes man to fly
From out the path of duty to mankind.
Man lives for man, and he should seek to try
To raise his brother who to right is blind ;
Point out the way, and lift him from the mire
Of sin, and with fresh hope his soul inspire.

Sin is too direful for a laugh or smile—
That will not kill it, nor impede its course ;
Nor with harsh words its doings to revile—
That only hardens it ; and so does force.
Place sin but openly and show its falls,
Men will shrink from it, for its sight appals,

Oft would a feeling of regret o'erspread

His face, when he recalled the long-past days.

How bitter is regret when what has fled

Has not been seized, but left by heedless ways !

And still more bitter to the man of thought

When he perceives that what he did was nought.

When, in old age, no fruit adorns our toil,

Although our labours have been hard and long,

And from the past our thoughts with grief recoil,

As memory has but failure for its song.

Oh ! for oblivion and the lotus-flower,

To purge our minds from life's unhappy hour !

Yet, blessed Heaven, we thank Thee for Thy care ;

Thou hast provided man with sweeter balm

Than all oblivion's medicine can repair ;

Thou pointest to a future clear and calm.

Immortal hope bids us anew begin

A life which all may live, and all may win !

And winning, what immortal joys belong
To labours that are happiness to do !
With sorrow ne'er oppressed, nor fraught with wrong,
For all is pleasure when the aim is true ;
Nothing to doubt, no failure by to fear,
The way is open, and the daylight clear.

Thrice blessed he who can look back with joy
O'er life's brief day, and feel that all his aims
Have been to act the truth, and sin destroy ;
Urging the world, till all with loud acclaims
Shall own that Truth is joy, that Goodness lives ;
But sin is death, its breath destruction gives.

Some lay up riches for their years of age,
And think of all that may adorn this life ;
Ah ! little do their heedless minds engage
The thoughts of how they may avoid the strife,
And the dissatisfactions which befall
Old age when worldly pleasure has been all.

They speculate with mortal life as though

They could their fates o'errule, and live and die
Whene'er they choose ; when at the slightest blow

Of wind they perish, and as dust lay by ;
And their immortal part—they know not where
It goes ; nor by their actions seem to care.

They say, " There is no time, life is too short ;

The world would pass them by, if they should stay
To think on it ; " and yet they know they ought,

But dare not to confess it ; or they may
Be ridiculed by some unthinking friend,
Who cares for nought but what will serve his end.

Would it be happiness to live at ease—

No aim in view and nothing to acquire ?

O man, how hard it is thy mind to please !

Thou knowest not thyself what to desire ;
To live in idleness is not delight—

'Tis worse than death ; 'tis madness, gloom, and night.

Object is life ; we all an object own,

Some point to aim at, and some goal to win ;

Blest Providence ! thou dost for grief atone

By giving us this antidote 'gainst sin.

It occupies our thoughts, o'ercomes despair,

Urges the soul to trust in holy prayer.





CANTO VI.

THE old man knew life's sun was in the west ;
 'Twas sinking and would soon be out of sight,
To rise upon a fairer land, more blest,
 With greater zeal, and with redoubled light.
He felt a hope, that banished many a pain,
That he would see that little one again.

'Twas now he found his journey had not been
 Upon a road that led to a bright end ;
He had been blinded, and he had not seen,
 Because he had not made his God his friend.
He smiled at seeking aid from that high Power,
But now he felt the want, in age's hour.

How wondrous is the working of man's fate,
Whose course was fixed before the world began !
Oppose it, and life is but bitter hate ;
God points the way to every mortal man.
He may another choose, but it will be
Marred with grim failure, and destruction see.

The old man saw no light upon the road
Which he had traversed all these weary years ;
He thought on what a fruitless path he'd trod :
Could he but start again, though bent with cares !
Could he but find some aiding hand to show
The way, which he had spurned so long ago !

Whene'er a man begins to feel that he
Has gone astray, then seeks to do the right,
The powers of darkness will about him be,
And do their utmost with their strength and might
To mar his outset, and to drive away
All thoughts of goodness that point out the way.

Thus with the old man ; sin approached him now,
And whispered in his ear, " It is too late !"
It wore despair upon its changeful brow,
And shook its head, and told him, " It is fate !"
But Hope then spake, and boldly sin outbraved :
" Trust in thy God alone, and thou art saved."

Sin knew its time for action was hard by,
The last decisive battle was at hand ;
It did not quit its victim, but was nigh,
Ready against its enemy to stand.
What peace could be within a soul beset
With two such powers in opposition met ?

The hour of death shows what man's aim has been
In life ; it has no cloak to hide it then ;
But guilt is then displayed, and crime is seen,
And by the fearful look betrayed to men.
Truth comes at last, though he has lived a lie,
And all his actions based on villainy !

How sad, and yet how glorious, 'tis to see,
The aged, white with years, though young in soul,
Leaving this world, and knowing he will be
Released for ever from sin's dire control;
Whose earthly course has had a higher aim
Than worldly pleasure, which doth lead to shame !

God gave man life that he might learn to live—
Genius and knowledge from His boundless store
To few, that they to man should likewise give
As He to them, that all might Truth explore ;
And find in it that peace by sin unknown—
That peace which floweth from the Father's throne.

And yet how few will learn to live aright,
And to be truthful ; 'tis they never try :
Man is so heedless, and his sole delight
Seems but to think that life's a living lie ;
“ Be merry, eat and drink, for death is nigh ;
Seek pleasure, for to-morrow we may die.”

There is no future with the worldly man ;
Religion is a farce, and Heaven a dream
That poets write of, and in verses scan—
A sort of fairyland, a mazy theme,
All unregarded by the blinded crowd,
Who for the present pleasures cry aloud.

But is it so in death's dark, solemn hour ?
Does Pleasure bid him smile and seek her then ?
No ; she has fled to others in the flower
Of youth, who, foolish, sport upon her glen,
And leaves the worldling in the hand of Death,
And mocks him as he vainly gasps for breath.

The last faint ray was fading in his eye ;
A mighty power still urged him on to pray ;
He heard the voices of his friends gone by,
And saw the little one in bright array.
“ O God ! ” he cried, “ though from Thee I did roam,
Let a worn pilgrim find with Thee his home ! ”

He saw the little child, as death drew nigh,
Come towards him with a smile, his soul to greet :
Death seized upon his prey, then soared on high,
And laid the soul before its Maker's feet.
The angels stood around in silence there,
And gazed upon the mighty power of prayer.

God looked with love upon the little child,
Then on the aged one beneath His throne ;
And thus He spake, in accents calm and mild :
" Thou has done well ; thou camest not alone,
But brought with thee a soul by sin opprest ;
And for this act be thou for ever blest."

Then, turning to the trembling soul, He spoke :
" Arise, and be thou cleansed from thy sin."
Then as from out a spell his spirit broke,
And rose, to fall again and worship Him ;
He felt the power of mercy o'er him cast,
He was at peace now with his God at last.

'Twas from this moment he began to live,
For life cannot exist except in God ;
He started now anew to learn to give
All he'd neglected in the path he'd trod.
He found that work for God was joy, not pain,
Yielding a harvest more than golden grain.

And, lo! the angels struck their harps again ;
It was the hymn he'd heard within his dream ;
And now he knew they had not sung in vain,
The sounds swept o'er him like a radiant beam.
It was the hymn the ransomed and the blest
Sing to their God for His eternal rest.



CANTO VII.

IN death's long sleep the aged man reposed,
Calm, beautiful, as though he dreamed of God;
A look past human powers his face disclosed ;
He looked too glorious for the burial clod.
Oh, that the worlding could have seen that sight,
Beauteous, though awful ; death-like, yet so bright !

Picture the scene with Thought's immortal eye ;
There lay the marble form in perfect rest,
His mother's Bible at his side lay by,
His right hand laid upon the page so blest ;
As though in death confirming faith and truth,
And urging to the last old age and youth.

His fingers rested on those words profound,

“ My son, though dead, he is alive again,
Though he was lost, behold now he's found,”

As though in death that lesson to maintain,
Which showed the world the story of his life,
Now freed from bodily and mental strife.

For he who lies in death is freed from sin ;

The powers of darkness have performed their task ;
Peace follows war ; the sunlight then bursts in
Of endless happiness ; and doth unmask
The face of Life, that has been hid awhile,
And shines redoubled with Truth's radiant smile.

The giddy world rushed in upon the scene

To gaze upon the faded, lifeless clay,
But stood aghast, as though their eyes had seen
Something beyond the common death-like way.
Could it be he, the Atheist, with his eye
Fixed on that Book, which he had deemed a lie ?

His look portrayed a calmness life had not,
Earnest and piercing, as though from his lips
There flowed a stream of eloquence, begot
Of Heaven's transcendant words, that did eclipse
The thoughts of man, and told that it was there
That he had found the balm of worldly care.

The reckless youth in mute dismay stood by,
Awe-struck, as never he had stood before ;
His conscience smote him ; and, unknown, a sigh
Rose from his heart, and made him think the more.
“ When shall I thus my fleeting breath dismiss ?
Shall my last hour be peaceful like to this ? ”

Manhood was there, in all his power and strength ;
He too, in wonderment, prolonged his gaze :
“ And is this,” said he to himself, “ the length
And breadth of mortal life and mortal days ? ”
“ Yes,” answered conscience, “ you must likewise fall
Beneath Death's sickle, for he taketh all.”

Old age beheld, and trembled at the sight :

“ I too must follow shortly : shall I find
As calm a passage through that gloomy night ?
Can I o'er life with pleasure look behind ? ”
Thus did the aged commune, as his eye
Looked upon death, as though to learn to die.

Ah ! what a lesson doth mankind teach man !

Even in death it doth not cease its tale :
Man sees himself depicted, and can scan
From out yon senseless mould what cannot fail
To reach the soul's long-blinded eye—that he
In after years must likewise with him be.

Man is but dust, he shall to dust return—

That is, the man the mortal eye can view ;
But that which he alone can now discern
In thought starts upward into life anew.
What shall it be ? A brighter, happier one,
Cheered by a light from Truth's ne'er-setting sun ?

Or shall it traverse through another sphere,
Until it learn to bend its course aright ?
An ordeal fiercer than the sad one here,
Pent up to find its way through sadder plight.
Death makes man think of future past the grave ;
Do all his works a path to Heaven pave ?

But silence, Thought, and stay thy course, my pen ;
All in one brief short line contains the whole.
Write on—man cannot come to more—what then
Is this good rule, which can the world control ?
The soul shall tell you ; lo ! its words are this,
“ ’Tis Truth and Goodness—they alone are bliss.”

Yet what is bliss ? O man, it is to feel
That one is tending to another sphere
With loftier deeds, which may the soul-sick heal,
And do our best, while we in life are here.
It lightens sorrow, turns grief's night to day,
And brightens death, when we are called away.

When conscience is a curse, then man is wrong ;

It is the test and compass which doth steer
Always aright ; it doth to Heaven belong—

Part of the soul ; trust in it, do not fear.
It is the voice of God impressing man
To aim at right, and do good while he can.

Then wherefore linger ? Let us not delay ;

Life is but brief. Have we thus sought to live ?
If not, start onward ; 'tis the only way
That leads to greatness, and will power give.
Who would be nothing ? Learn this as from fate,
Tis goodness only that can make man great.

Onward, O world ! All nature cries aloud

For man to rescue her from death and sin ;
Shall he succumb, and by his sloth be bowed
Down to the earth, nor strive o'er wrong to win ?
Has true ambition faded from man's soul,
And shall we live in chains by hell's control ?

Shall we, who seek to be among the first
While in this mortal flesh we linger here,
Strive not with all our might the bonds to burst
That hedge us in ? Shall we recoil in fear ?
Man, think of future ! let sin be withstood ;
Be great for ever—great in doing good.

Ye who would lead the world, and do so now,
Are ye endeavouring thus to lead them on ?
Remember, if you fail you break the vow
Of true allegiance to the King's own Son.
The power to lead mankind by God is given ;
Would'st thou not lead them also when in Heaven ?

If man is mortal, seek what earth can give,
And seize on life and pleasure while you can ;
But thou art ever, and shalt ever live !
This from beginning was God's mighty plan.
Men, ye are gods ! immortal ! rise and be
What God intended, now that ye are free.

Are ye still silent ? and shall hell proclaim
That we are cowards, fearful of its power—
They who have dared o'er us as kings to reign,
And lead us to death's dark and grisly bower ?
We are not slaves ! arise, and hell defy !
What soul fears death, when it can never die ?





